

Life After Death in a Chinese Community

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ABSTRACT

According to San Fillipo (2006), death is not the end of one's existence, but rather than a transition from one life to another. However, it is different based on how the society and individuals see the concept of death itself and how they understand about it. Thus, this article aims to explore the understanding of the relationship between culture and religion that become their identity in terms of death and life after. Qualitative approach is adopted for this study. Indeed, interview and empirical observation were used to obtain quality data.

Keywords: Buddhism, Chinese, community, culture, life after death, Taoism

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INTRODUCTION

Death in general can be defined as a separation of the soul from the body. To Dietrich (1997: p.19), death is a natural stage in the repeating cycle of renewal. While in the medical terms, death can be defined as a phenomenon when a person's heart stopped beating and that is called as "clinical death" (Wasmuth, 1969). From humans to plants and animals as living creatures, death is a situation that will definitely happen to the living things. The concepts of death to humans is associated with the belief system or religion. It exists in almost all religions in the world. Death from the other side can be seen as a phase of life where most of religion belief death is not the ending of life. As stated by San Fillipo (2006) death is not the end of one's existence but rather than a transition from one life to another. However, it is different based on how the society and individuals see the concept of death itself and how they understand about it.

In relation to the concept of death and life after death, different religions have a different conviction about what would happen to humans after they die. Death and the life after often compromise with culture of the society that combines with their belief system. Culture plays an important role in all society that becomes their identity. An example that can be seen on the relationship between culture and religion in some society is through the grave. Every religion has a distinctive way of burial when someone dies. In this case, the grave is an important element of the cultural attachment that distinguishes one society to another in terms of their belief and religion. Furthermore, cultural attachment on the grave such as symbols, rituals, practices and customs has a relation to the life after death in certain society and religion.

Regarding to the issue of the life after death, this research is conducted on the Chinese community that embrace Buddhism and Taoism. Chinese community has a unique belief towards the life after death. The cultural attachment of the grave especially symbols in Buddhism and Taoism Chinese community manifested the life of dead person in the second life. Besides that, practices, rituals and offerings to the ancestors believed to have the connection between the living and the dead person's life. Therefore, this study is aimed to make the understanding of the relationship between culture and religion that become their identity in terms of death and life after.

"All the deceased's papers were burnt in the brick oven [at the cemetery] ...Food was provided and set out on the newly made grave so that the departed might not go hungry ... (T) he dead was given a coin to hold in the mouth, with which to pay admission to heaven" (Lund, 1947 as cited in Briggs, 2002:p.8).